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ABSTRACT

A series of guidelines for use by Extension agents, as they involve socially and economically disadvantaged youth and adults in volunteer leadership roles in rural and urban Extension programs, is presented. Section headings are: Know Your Audience, Establish Rapport, Levels of Leadership, Leader Development, Leadership Roles, Volunteer Recruitment, Evaluation, The Agent's Role, and a Bibliography is furnished. It is concluded that the need for indigenous volunteers to work with Extension workers has never been greater. The success that Extension achieves in engaging volunteers from among the disadvantaged will depend on the extent and level of the volunteer's involvement, thoroughness in educational program planning and Extension's commitment to serve all people. (Author/NF)

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VOLUNTEERS

A CHALLENGE FOR EXTENSION WORKERS

DEVELOPING VOLUNTEER LEADERS FROM DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

AC 012756

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FOREWORD

This publication has been prepared for use by Extension agents as they involve socially and economically disadvantaged youth and adults in volunteer leadership roles in rural and urban Extension programs. A second publication, on training volunteer leaders, is being prepared. These publications should strengthen and support agents' beliefs that:

Leadership potential can be found in all segments of society.

Leadership traits are developed; not inherited.

Leadership tasks involve definable and divisible responsibilities.

Leadership tasks provide personal growth opportunities.

Extension can, and will, recruit and train volunteers from the low-income audience.

The Cooperative Extension Service can conduct educational programs with low-income youth and adults.

We are grateful to the county, State, and USDA Extension staff members who were consulted in writing this publication.

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A volunteer leader is one who influences the attitudes and actions of others and receives no financial pay for doing so.

Volunteer leaders are important and unique members of a nationwide Extension teaching team. Without volunteers, Extension would be unable to involve many families in its educational programs.

In the 70's, Extension's needs for volunteers will greatly increase. Other agencies and organizations also will be seeking more volunteers. This means that those who wish to recruit volunteers must make their needs known in an effective way, offer an outstanding training program, and provide tasks and responsibilities that volunteers will find challenging and satisfying.

As more Extension teaching efforts are directed toward the nation's low-income population, more low-income volunteer leaders must be identified, recruited, and trained. Most families reached with information by these volunteers probably would not be reached in any other way. The importance of the volunteer teacher in this situation cannot be underestimated. Here, also, Extension educators have an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to provide program participation for all segments of society.

Potential benefits from the involvement of low-income volunteer leaders are:

- Volunteers can become examples for their peers.
- Volunteers can benefit from personal growth opportunities.
- Volunteers can provide a meaningful sense of direction for Extension programs.
- Volunteers can serve as a communication medium for staff-to-client and client-to-staff relationships.
- Volunteers can increase understanding between different groups.
- Volunteers can make it possible for Extension to increase its services despite limited budgets.
- Volunteers can help Extension agents understand life styles different from their own.
- Volunteers can increase citizen participation in Extension programs.

The question, "Why recruit low-income volunteer leaders?" is answered when the potential benefits of this action are considered. Extension, the volunteers, the people you seek to reach with volunteer help, and the community-at-large, all stand to gain.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Abilities, needs, and interests of the potential low-income volunteer leader, as well as alternatives available to this volunteer, must be recognized when programs with low-income and disadvantaged people are planned.

Developing leadership among the low-income and disadvantaged population is sometimes difficult because of an agent's limited experience with this audience. Work with the audience will increase your knowledge. Continued study of literature on the subject also will help you to know your audience.

Agents who are more experienced in this work can sometimes appear too confident in their knowledge of the audience. This can create as many difficulties as a lack of knowledge. Middle-class professionals need to be careful lest they generalize too much, and allow their own values to lead them to misinterpret the behavior of others.

Some caution is advisable in delineating differences between socioeconomic groups, beyond the generalization that all poor families are lacking in money and that much of their behavior is at least causually related to this economic lack. Most low-income and disadvantaged people, however, have some of the following characteristics:

- Less than average formal education.
- Modest expectations for achievement.
- Little experience in formal organizations.
- Not future oriented.
- Lack confidence.
- Feel that identification as leaders might jeopardize relationships with peers.
- See life as unpatterned and unpredictable.
- May show alienation toward society.
- Feel powerless.
- Cynical or fatalistic attitude.
- Unemployed or underemployed.
- Greater tolerance for conflict, stress, ambiguity.
- Greater strength to cope with, and endure, in an adverse environment.
- Likely to be a member of a large family, where the head of household is female, young, old, or physically handicapped.

ESTABLISH RAPPORT

In any volunteer recruitment effort, communication and mutual understanding with the audience to be reached are essential. Extension educators must establish and maintain this rapport with the low-income audience, if they have not already done so. Aides in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program are effective in making Extension resources known to low-income families. Their assistance also can be valuable in establishing rapport with the community Extension wants to reach, and in recruiting volunteers.

The following guidelines will help you establish rapport with the low-income audience:

- Show a sincere interest in people as people, rather than as role performers.
- Let everything that you write or say show that you have respect for low-income people as human beings.
- Use simple terms when you talk or write. But be sure to let your audience know that you know they also have knowledge.
- Be sensitive to differences in values and beliefs.
- Be tactful in rejecting an idea that you feel is inaccurate or inappropriate.
- Try to understand the social, cultural, and economic limitations that are present in a low-income situation.

LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

Most people can be classified as beginner, intermediate, or high-level leaders, depending on the leadership training they may have had, their experience in leadership roles, and natural leadership abilities. An Extension professional who recruits volunteer leaders would be well advised to consider the leadership capacity of each candidate, and the implications that this presents, in relation to the training and support needed for a volunteer's growth and development.

Volunteers at the beginning level of leadership may be recognized by these characteristics:

- Concern for others is primarily limited to their kinship group and a few close friends.
- Attitudes and behavior tend to be authoritarian.
- Decisions tend to be based on folkways that emphasize "here and now" with little planning for the future.
- Situation in which the individual functions best is close to home, or at home.

Leadership functions that the beginning leader could, and probably would perform as an Extension Service volunteer:

- Invite a few close friends to her home so that someone else could teach a lesson there.
- Invite people to a public meeting place where other people serve in leadership roles.
- Be responsible for some of the physical arrangements for a meeting.
- Show a few people how to do things that the leader feels are important, such as: how to prepare a simple, inexpensive food.

Volunteers at the intermediate level of leadership may be recognized by these characteristics:

- Concern for others includes acquaintances; but it is largely confined to the local community, and to people who are of similar age, sex, ethnic group. and culture.
- Decisions are based on provincial folkways at times, although increased flexibility is evident. Future plans receive more consideration, and more alternatives are considered before a decision is made. The individual knows more alternatives and resources.
- Increased sensitivity to human relationships and higher personal ego strength results in a more democratic attitude.

Leadership functions that the intermediate leader could, and probably would perform as an Extension Service volunteer:

- Invite to her home people she might not know except by reputation. Instead of depending on someone else to teach this group, the leader would probably do this.
- Agree to serve, or volunteer to serve, as an organization or subject matter leader with groups of people like herself; sometimes with people who are different. Topics she might discuss with these groups include: planning nutritious meals, food and its effect on health, making a food shopping list,

meal preparation skills and other household and family management tasks and skills.

- Make arrangements for meetings in public places.
- Perform various functions in a group to make the group successful.
- Delegate tasks to others.

Volunteers at a high level of leadership may be recognized by these characteristics:

- Concern is greater for people like and unlike themselves.
- Attitudes and behavior are more democratic.
- Rational decisions are made most of the time.
- Situation in which they function best is their entire social milieu.
- They are more aware of community problems.
- Jobs at an organizational level can be performed.

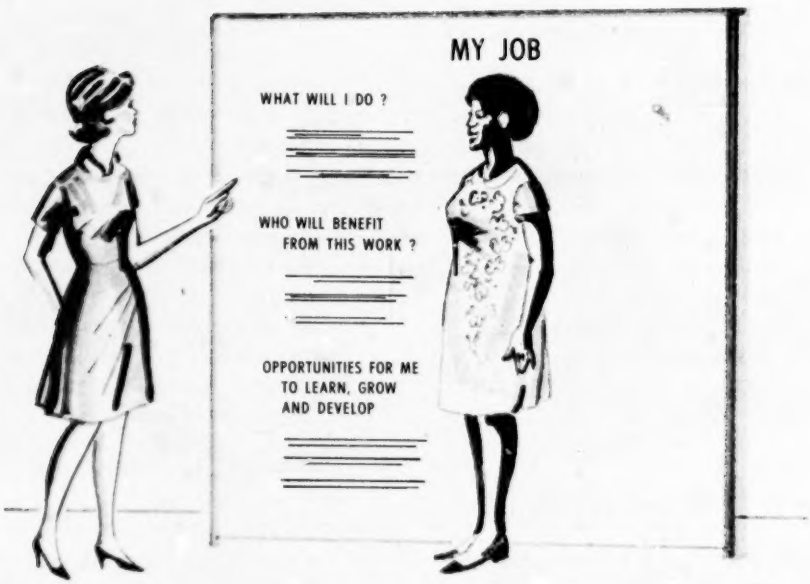
Leadership functions that the high level leader could, and probably would perform as an Extension Service volunteer:

- Organize groups for neighborhood action in some specific concern or project.
- Show active concern for, and help to work towards the solution of social problems that affect the quality of living for many families.
- Serve as a resource person in planning and executing a public affairs education program.
- Recruit others for leadership positions.
- Help to establish or improve local food programs, such as a school lunch or food distribution program.

LEADER DEVELOPMENT

An understanding of leadership levels can help the trainer of volunteer leaders become more adept in providing opportunities for volunteers to achieve individual growth and develop leadership skills. Prior to the recruitment of leaders, some plans should be considered which would permit such leadership development. Staff members charged with this responsibility must:

- Make needs and rewards for volunteer service known to potential volunteers.
- Establish and maintain rapport with the target audience.
- Match jobs with leadership skills and maturity of potential volunteers.
- Provide training that will motivate volunteers to want to continue to serve as volunteers, and increase their leadership skills.
- Recognize, and respond to, the need for coordinated, cooperative staff relationships.
- Provide encouragement, support, and recognition to volunteers.



LEADERSHIP ROLES

Delineation of the leadership role may be done by the professional who is most directly involved, by an advisory group, or by the professional and those volunteers now performing similar roles. The volunteer role, as defined to the volunteer, should be clear, concise, easy to understand, and answer the following questions:

- What are the tasks to be done by the volunteer in this assignment?
- How will the job help the volunteer grow and develop?
- Why is this work important?
- Who will benefit from this work?
- How much will this work cost the volunteer in terms of time, money, and other resources?
- Who will share the credit and criticism for this work?

Explain clearly to the potential volunteer the dates, hours, duties, and responsibilities she will need to know. Be flexible. A slight adjustment sometimes can be made in job requirements so that they more nearly fit the leadership level and interests of the volunteer. If possible, offer several alternative roles to provide a choice. The leadership role of the volunteer should be flexible and subject to review. This will allow both the professional and the volunteer to increase their job effectiveness and find continuing satisfaction in their work.

The recruitment of volunteers, and the necessity to define leadership roles for these workers, emphasizes the need for Extension professionals and aides to have a thorough understanding of the leadership development process, and its relationship to Extension education programs. They also need to understand why people from all segments of society need to be involved. Job descriptions for all paid staff members should clearly indicate their roles and responsibilities in the implementation of leader development programs.

Some paid staff may have difficulty assigning work which they have previously done, to others. They may feel that without those tasks, their jobs will be less satisfying, and perhaps, less important. They also may be concerned about whether this work will be done satisfactorily by a volunteer. Careful groundwork is required to show all concerned that volunteers can help present staff members expand their services and reach new audiences.

Aides, volunteers, and Extension agents must be able to work as a close-knit team. Each member of that team should feel that his or her role is complementary to others' roles, and that all team members play an important part in getting the job done.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

To recruit volunteer leaders from the low-income audience, these steps are recommended:

- Analyze what you and other members of the Extension staff know about the people you hope to recruit as volunteers. Make careful plans to learn other things you feel you need to know. County staffs involved in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program will have considerable knowledge about the target audience. Recruitment of volunteers could be a natural job for an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program advisory committee if it has ample representation from the target audience.
- Arrange to discuss volunteer opportunities offered by Extension with some paid and volunteer leadership from other agencies in your county who serve the people you want to reach. Some of the potential advantages of doing this are:
  - Duplication of efforts can be reduced.
  - Agencies can learn more about the contributions that Extension can make, to help disadvantaged people help themselves. Through such discussions, new ideas often develop.
  - Relationships with other agencies can be strengthened.
  - Extension can learn how other agencies recruit and utilize volunteers from the low-income audience; and explore ways that cooperative recruiting and training efforts can be achieved.

(Some agencies that could be contacted for these purposes include: Bureau of Indian Affairs; Community Action Programs; elected public officials and precinct committee members; employment services; Farmers Home Administration; food distribution centers; food stamp offices; libraries; Model Cities programs; public health departments, public welfare and other social agencies; rural mail carriers; school officials and teachers; Social Security Administration; tribal councils; Red Cross; local merchants, small loan companies, and traders; priests, ministers, and other spiritual leaders; Urban League, NAACP, and similar organizations; voluntary organizations such as: YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts.

Cooperation with other agencies in the use of facilities and, as much as possible, in the use of materials, is important. Periodic visits with other agency officials will help to promote this cooperation.)

- Arrange opportunities for you and members of the target audience to become acquainted, so that they will know that you are interested in them and their problems; and realize that Ex-

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tension can be of benefit to them. Such meetings can also provide an invaluable sounding board for ideas, and keep Extension workers in touch with current feelings and opinions in the community. Many Extension agents find that meetings with small groups, on subjects of interest to those groups, can provide this opportunity.

- Make special recruitment efforts to enlist the help of adult males and teenagers. These volunteers are especially effective with low-income youth. Most Extension volunteers are women, but an increasing number are men and teenagers.
- Be prepared to cope with deterrents that can limit the participation of low-income and disadvantaged volunteers.

The volunteer may feel that she cannot afford to participate. You can help to reduce the costs of participation by:

- Holding training meetings and other activities near her home.
- Getting other volunteers to serve as babysitters while the volunteer is in training or performing her volunteer role.
- Arranging ways to make payment for financial expenses incurred while she is doing the job.

Limited social and educational experiences may have left the volunteer feeling that she is incapable of doing the job. The training you provide can build self-confidence if it is truly centered on the learner. Training, at least in the beginning, should be held where the volunteer is comfortable and feels free to express herself. She needs to feel that her clothes and behavior are appropriate. A building with a NO SMOKING rule may be a poor choice for a meeting place.

The volunteer may feel that she will be sorry she participated. While this may relate to her failure expectations, she also might have concern that her peer relationships may change after she has assumed a leadership role.

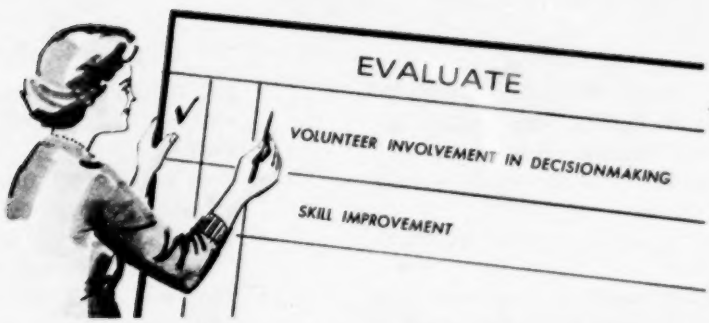
She may feel that you really do not want her services. She wants to see an action commitment on your part that you feel her services are important. Frequent reassurances that her services are worthwhile and that you think she can do an acceptable job, will be needed. Positive conviction on the part of all paid staff members about the important role volunteers can and will serve in the program will do much to foster a climate in which volunteers will feel that they are really needed.

What the volunteer is called may have a positive or negative effect. It is advisable to involve volunteers in the selection of their title. While names may not be important to some people, they are extremely important to others. Titles most frequently used are: advisor, volunteer, leader, helper, assistant aide, Extension helper, and youth volunteer.

Carefully consider the attributes you seek in a volunteer. As an educator, you will be able to teach the skills and knowledge needed to do the job. In recruiting people to receive this training and serve as volunteers, you must have a good idea of the kind of volunteer you need. Many agents report that they look for volunteers who:

- Like people.
- Like to learn.
- Have respect for others.
- Can accept people with different values.
- Show capacity to work as team members with Extension staff members and other volunteers.

Be realistic about the number of volunteers for whom you can provide training, opportunities for service, recognition, and other assistance. Success is important in recruiting volunteers for present and future program development. The volunteer's satisfaction in being a volunteer will largely determine how long he or she continues to serve and also, how encouraging the volunteer will be to other recruits. Success also is important to your feelings of self-confidence.



EVALUATION

Extension professionals recruiting volunteers from low socioeconomic groups will want to assess the effectiveness of their leadership development work. In doing this, the following questions need to be asked:

- Are volunteers involved in the decision-making process of Extension program development?
- How many volunteers from the low socioeconomic group are actually active at any leadership level?
- How many people from the low socioeconomic group are participating in programs for which volunteers from this group provide leadership?
- How many people have volunteer leaders encouraged to improve their leadership skills?
- Within any leadership level, is there the opportunity for increased effectiveness and satisfaction?
- Are volunteers given opportunities to improve their leadership skills and move to another level?
- Is leadership training continuous, and is it planned to meet the needs of leaders at all levels?

THE AGENT'S ROLE

The success of a volunteer program depends, to a great extent, on the effectiveness of the Extension agent who directs it. Your success in developing low-income volunteer leadership

will be largely determined by factors such as:

- Your knowledge of, and attitude toward, your audience.
- Your sensitivity to the needs of low-income people.
- Your verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
- Your ability to choose from your store of knowledge that knowledge which is applicable to families with economic deprivations.
- Your flexibility to develop programs which are appropriate to the abilities and cultural experiences of the socio-economic group with which you are working.
- Your willingness to learn from, as well as teach, the target audience.
- Your ability to avoid stereotyping either the leaders or low-income people.
- Your willingness and ability to establish rapport with the audience.
- Your willingness to look for commonalities your audiences have, and at the same time, understand individual differences that influence behavior.

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SUMMARY

The involvement of indigenous volunteers in Extension programs should be considered both a means to an end, and an end in itself. The help of indigenous leaders is essential in Extension's effort to design and implement programs that reach new audiences, serve multi needs, and make full use of local resources.

Extension recognizes its responsibility to encourage the development of the individual. One of the most effective ways to help individuals grow has been to engage volunteers in Extension programs, and through training and support, assist them to develop and advance to higher levels of leadership.

The need for indigenous volunteers to join hands with Extension workers has never been greater. Extension agents must "feel the need" for an extramural faculty of volunteers in connection with programs developed with the disadvantaged. If the potentialities of volunteer leadership are to become a reality, there must be imaginative planning, action and appraisal.

Certain obstacles sometimes make educational work with the disadvantaged difficult but the rewards from effectively serving this group are unlimited. The success that Extension achieves in engaging volunteers from among the disadvantaged will depend on the extent and level of the volunteer's involvement, the thoroughness with which educational programs are planned, and Extension's commitment to serve all people.

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